

Jesuit Prays to Kateri Tekakwitha, Regains Sight

An American Jesuit Bible scholar attributes restoration of sight in one eye which has a destroyed optic nerve to the



LILY OF MOHAWKS
Kateri Tekakwitha, who is
a candidate for sainthood
(RNS Photos)

miraculous intercession of a Mohawk Indian girl who is a candidate for sainthood.

Father Walter M. Abbott said he suddenly regained sight in his left eye after he and friends had prayed for the miracle for more than a year to Kateri Tekakwitha, who died in 1680.

The 53-year-old priest, who works in Rome as Pope Paul's representative in all common Bible work, said that he had letters from two leading eye specialists who claim that the return of his sight was "medically impossible and beyond explanation." The letters are being turned over to the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Optic Nerve Destroyed

Father Abbott, a native of Boston, lost sight in his eye when he fell down a marble staircase in his Rome residence June 24, 1975. The priest fractured his skull and wrist and dislocated his jaw. Physicians said head damage caused a hemorrhage which eventually destroyed the optic nerve in the left eye.

The priest related that he returned to the United States for further medical attention in September 1975, and at that time three eye specialists determined that the optic nerve had been destroyed.

"They said there was nothing left of the optic nerve but dead matter," the priest said. "They also told me, individually, that once the optic nerve is gone, there is no way for sight to ever return."

Father Abbott said it was while he was recuperating at Campion Renewal Center, a Jesuit health complex in Weston, Mass., last year that he met Father Henri Bechard, S.J., who is vice-postulator in the cause of sainthood for the "Lily of the Mohawks."

"He said they had one confirmed first class miracle in connection with Kateri and that there is a possible miracle on record in Arizona but they still needed a second confirmed miracle to go ahead with the cause of beatification and eventual

canonization," Father Abbott recalled. "He was interested in my case and asked if I would go to the grave of the girl and begin praying to her for a miracle."

Father Abbott continued that in October, 1975, accompanied by his mother, sister and several others, he visited the Indian girl's tomb in Caughnawaga, south of Montreal on an Indian reservation.

Began Prayer Crusade

"Father Bechard explained to me that in 1682 a formula of prayer to the 'Lily of the Mohawks' had been established for the intention of her beatification," Father Abbott related. "It consists of one Our Father, one Hail Mary and three Glory be to the Father each day and I began saying the prayers for the miracle intention."



JESUIT BIBLE SCHOLAR Father Walter M. Abbott attributes restoration of sight in left eye to Kateri.

The priest added that many others, including a cardinal and a Jesuit expert on the life of Kateri, joined in the prayer crusade.

The expert on Kateri's life, Father Francis X. Weiser, professor-emeritus of theology at Jesuit-run Boston College, pointed out the Church is cautious in accepting miracles.

"Father Abbott is personally convinced that his sight restoration was a miracle," Father Weiser commented. "Of course there is subjective assurance there. What the Church must have is pure objective assurances. I have not yet seen the letters he got from the two doctors. Perhaps they will provide the objective assurances to move things along. I hope so."

This past Christmas Father Abbott returned to the United States to be with his family in Boston, and took the occasion for re-examination by two of the doctors who had said he had had no chance of ever regaining sight in the left eye.

"There was a Catholic specialist in New York and a Jewish expert in Boston and they both came to the same conclusion -- the optic nerve was still nothing but dead tissue and yet I had better than 50 per cent vision in the eye," Father Abbott said in an interview with Common Sense, newspaper of the Memphis Diocese.

Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 of a Christian Algonquin mother and a pagan Iroquois father in a village on the Mohawk River now known as Auriesville, N.Y. She was baptized on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676, by Jesuit missionary Father James de Lamberville, and a year later ran away to the mission of St. Francis Xavier of Sault Ste. Marie in Quebec. She took vows of perpetual virginity and in 1630 died after being ill for many months.

Reflecting on the Indian girl's life, Father Abbott said that as a child she had smallpox which left her face pocked and eyes weak. "This might be the connection with the eye," he said.



JESUIT COMMUNITY BOSTON COLLEGE CHESTNUT HILL MASSACHUSETTS

Christmas Day, 1976

His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Cordeiro
Archbishop of Karachi, Pakistan

Your Eminence:

You and I have been friends since 1948, when we began studies at Oxford together. Although I normally call you by your first name, I address you today with great reverence because with this letter I wish to put something on the record, the striking testimony of faith which you made when you were last in Rome, not long ago. You phoned me, as you always do, to find out when we might meet, but first you asked how my left eye was. When I replied I had no change in its condition to report to you, in other words, I was still blind in that eye as a result of the accident of June 24, 1975, you said immediately and simply, "I am sure it will come," meaning that you were sure my sight would return some day, although you surely remembered what I had told you, that three eye specialists had said the damage was permanent. One doctor, you will recall, said the damage was irreversible, another said "permanent damage; no treatment indicated"; the third doctor said it would be a first-class miracle if my sight returned.

Now I have something new to report. I can now see, with my right eye closed, the whole lower half of my room, in full color, in perfect perspective. I sent this news to you first on account of your faith and prayers, because you are the highest-ranking churchman I know as a personal friend of such long standing (nearly 30 years), because you also know my mother and my sister Phyllis and have visited their home, and because you have visited, with me, the Franciscan Sisters in Via Cassia, Rome, who have prayed daily since June, '75, for what is now happening. I want to share this good news with all of them, and with the three doctors, but I cannot write individual letters to all who've prayed so faithfully and therefore I'm presuming your permission to send a photocopy of this letter to each of them. I know you well enough to be sure that you will permit me to do this.

With my right eye completely closed, I can walk into or out of a strange restaurant and not hit any tables on the way. My left eye is not yet good enough to drive a car with that eye alone open, but I'm now wondering when that day will come. Since I have the opportunity to be in Boston and New York, Dec. 23 to January 12, I will ask the three doctors to examine my eye and I will ask what they now think. At any rate, for you and for all my family and friends, and for me, Christmas 1976 is a time of special joy. I look forward to 1977.

Happily in the Lord,

Walter Abbott, Jr.

Copies to: Mom + Phyllis, Marjory Luthman + Cecelia, Mary Hufferd
Cardinal Willibrands and Fr. Provincial and Fr. Rector in Rome
Fr. Weiser and Fr. Becherd (Vice-Postulator for beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha)
Mother Angela, OFM, and Community (Rome), Sr. Madonna + Community (Boston)

E vietato inserire qualsiasi oggetto
Il est défendu de joindre n'importe quel objet

REV. WALTER M. ABBOTT, S.J.
VILLA MALTA
VIA DI PORTA FINCIANA 1
00187 ROME, ITALY

Rev. Henri Bechard, S.J.
KATERI
Box 70
Caughnawaga PQ X0J
CANADA

Dear Father Henri:

In a separate envelope (air mail printed matter) I have sent you the latest news on my case.

Thanks very much for your letter of Feb. 9th. Thanks for your prayers to obtain a perfect cure. I like very much the sentence you put in your letter: "Kateri owed her deep spiritual life to the seventeenth-century Jesuits, and she is showing her gratitude by helping you."

I found out long ago that I could get along all right with one eye, doing my job, even driving a car (perfectly legal since 20/20 vision in only one eye is required for a licence). Therefore my prayer has been, and is, much more for the beatification of Kateri than for my own cure. It is a daily prayer, as I promised you it would be.

All best wishes to you!

Sincerely in the Lord,

Walter Abbott



Causa Venerabilis • Cause de la Vénérable • Cause of Venerable

KATERI TEKAKWITHA

February 8, 1977

Rev. Walter Abbot
Via Porta Pinciana 1
Rome 00187 Italy

Dear Father Walter,

How sorry I was not to have been in Caughnawaga when you came for your Christmas visit to Kateri! I was spending the holidays in Maine. This year, I stayed longer than usual, for my aunt and godmother, who is now 89 years old, and perfectly lucid, seemed happy to have me with her.

I was barely back to the Center, when I was obliged to go to New York for a few days, as a very dear friend of mine was to be invested as a Knight of Malta at St. Patrick's on account of his very generous help to Kateri's Cause.

When I finally made it to ~~my~~ ^{my} desk, I was overjoyed to find the copy of your letter to Cardinal Cordeiro. I immediately phoned your Mother, who told me that you were on the verge of leaving for New York to see your eye specialists. What tremendous good news! Count on my prayers to obtain the perfect cure! How well Providence arranges things. Kateri owed her deep spiritual life to the seventeenth century Jesuits, and she is showing her gratitude by helping you.

Have you ^{met with} ~~contacted~~ Father Paolo Molinari, S.J., who is Postulator General of Kateri's Cause ^{as well as} ~~along with those~~ of the Jesuit causes? I am sure he will be very happy and will do his best to further Kateri's beatification.

The best of health to you, dear Father, during what remains of 1977!

Fraternally in Christ,

"Every genuine testimony of love which we show to those in heaven tends toward and terminates in Christ, Who is the 'crown of all saints'."

(Vatican II.)

MISSIO SANCTI FRANCISCI XAVERII, A. D. 1668 FUNDATA
KATERI

Box 70

Caughnawaga, P. Q., Canada
J0L 1B0

You can help Kateri's Cause by reciting the Lord's Prayer daily for her prompt Beatification.

You can help Kateri's Cause by speaking about the Lily of the Mohawks to your friends.

You can help Kateri's Cause by finding a new subscriber to "Kateri": (\$1.00).

REV. WALTER M. ABBOTT, S.J.
VILLA MALTA
VIA DI PORTA PINCIANA 1
00187 ROME, ITALY

March 12, 1977

A note for those who received a photocopy of the letter I sent to Cardinal Cordeiro from Boston on Christmas Day, 1976

When I returned to Rome I prepared a footnote to that letter (see the enclosed page before reading this note further).

I prepared my report on the case, put the doctors' testimonies with it, and submitted everything to the Postulator General for the cause of Kateri Tekakwitha. I learned that he was in Africa at the moment, working on another cause for which he is responsible, and would not return until the end of February.

On March 6th the Postulator General wrote to me. He thanked me for the report and the documents. He added that immediately after his return to Rome he had given them to the Medical Board of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. He then informed me that the doctors (who include eye specialists) had come to the conclusion that my case could not be presented as a miracle for the beatification of Kateri "since the cure is not complete and moreover not of such a nature that a preternatural intervention of God must, of necessity, be assumed."

The Postulator General (Father Paolo Molinari, S.J.) then wrote: "Personally I am convinced that your cure is due to the intercession of Kateri and naturally I will continue to pray that it may soon be complete."

When I returned to Rome in the middle of January, I had vision in the lower half of my left eye and also in the upper left quadrant. There has been no further development. I still have no vision in the upper right quadrant. The vision that I do have is not the full clear vision that I have in my good right eye. I know that you pray daily, as I do, for restoration of full vision in my left eye, and I thank every one of you for your kindness.

Sincerely in the Lord,

Walter M. Abbott, S.J.

P.S. Cardinal Cordeiro sent me a letter January 1, 1977, rejoicing in the good news contained in my letter of Christmas Day and looking forward to talking with me personally again when he would come to Rome in March. He arrived two days ago, and I showed him Father Molinari's letter. Now all of you are up to date on this case.



Christmas Day, 1976

His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Cordeiro
Archbishop of Karachi, Pakistan

Your Eminence:

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Walter Abbott, Jr.

Copies to: Mom + Phyllis, Maryann Sullivan + Cecilia Mary Hutter
Cardinal Willebrandt and Fr. Provincial and Fr. Rector in Rome
Fr. Weiser and Fr. Beckard (Vice-Procurator for beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha)
Mother Angela, OFM, and Community (Rome), Sr. Madonna + Community (Boston)

After New Year's Day, 1977 I visited those eye specialists again. When I telephoned the Jewish doctor to ask for an appointment, explaining that my eye was functioning again, he said: "That is unbelievable!" He wished to see it the very next morning. When he finished his examination he said the optic nerve was still as dead as it had been when he saw it in the hospital in 1975 and yet it was true that the eye was again functioning. He could not explain it. He signed a complete record of his examinations. The Catholic doctor in New York, nine days later, found the eye functioning even better by that time, though the optic nerve was still dead. His testimony ends with the declaration that it cannot be explained by natural causes. Fr. Weiser initiated the campaign of prayer for this, in 1975, because one more first-class miracle was needed for Kateri Tekakwitha's beatification. The testimony is now ready for the Vatican's Congregation for Canonizations. The faith of all who have prayed gives perfect praise to the Lord.

copy for Fr. Béchard

REV. WALTER M. ABBOTT, S.J.
VILLA MALTA
VIA DI PORTA PINCIANA 1
00187 ROME, ITALY

March 17, 1977

Ms. Sally Baker
19169 Whitcomb
Detroit, Michigan 48235
USA

MAR. 24 1977

Dear Ms. Baker:

I apologize for being so slow in answering your letter of February 23rd. That article which you saw in The Michigan Catholic appeared in newspapers all over the USA and in some other countries, e.g., India, and I'm somewhat behind in answering all the letters I've received as a result.

Yours is one of the most interesting letters I've received. You have many petitions. You are searching for more spiritual strength to cope with all the problems you have. I am pleased to notice that you do not forget others in your petitions.

Yes, I will include your intentions in my daily prayers for the intercession of Kateri Tekakwitha, and I thank you for giving thanks to Kateri for her intercession in my behalf.

You included with your letter a donation of \$15 which you called "very small" because you have not been able to work for almost two years. I don't think such a donation is very small, especially under those circumstances. Now here is what I'm going to do with it. First, I'm sending enough of it to Father Henri Béchard, Vice-Postulator of Kateri's cause, so that he may send you two copies of Father F. X. Weiser's book about Kateri, one for you and the other for your friend whose foot problems make her janitorial job more difficult. Father Weiser's book is excellent. He is an old friend of mine, so I'm going to send some of your donation to him, to ask him to offer a Mass for you. Finally, I'm going to order two copies of his book so that I may give one to Cardinal Cordeiro, the Archbishop of Karachi, Pakistan, who has been my friend since we were students together at Oxford University nearly 30 years ago (he is the Cardinal mentioned in the article you read). He will be in Rome at the end of this month (he has to come here three or four times a year because he is a member of several key Vatican departments). The other copy of the book I will give to Pope Paul when I have my next visit with him.

I hope you will remember me and my work in your prayers. By the way, I'm presuming your permission to send copies of this letter to those mentioned in it, for their information and also so that they will pray for you too.

Sincerely yours,

Walter M. Abbott, S.J.

January 6, 1977.

Dear Fr. Bechard S.J.

I was very glad to get your nice card at Christmas time. I didn't send any this year as I had just gotten back from a week at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Brighton and wasn't able to do anything.

What I wanted to tell you was that Walter (Walter M. Abbott S.J.) phoned me from Rome a few days before Christmas and said his doctor had ordered him to take a 3 week's rest and he would be home for Christmas. (What a lovely Christmas present that was.) Phyllis suggested that we make a trip to the Indian Village in Quebec. Walter is a very good driver and Phyllis said with 2 drivers we would be O.K. We wanted to thank Kateri for a "partial" miracle. Walter has recovered about 50% of his sight in the left eye. We are still praying that he will get the rest of his sight so that a 1st class miracle will help to get Kateri's canonization through. The

trip up was lovely. Less snow up there
than we had here in Whitman. Fr. Beauduin
and Fr. Ziffel were very kind to us
and the only thing missing was Fr. Bedard.
We were invited to stay and have dinner
with the two priests and did. Walter learned
a lot more about Kateri while there.
This week Walter was seeing the two
Boston doctors and will see the New
York doctor before he goes back to Rome.
He was flying down with Fr. E. J. Callahan
of Boston to New Orleans and on his
way back he was flying to see four
former Italian residents who now live
in this country. He will see him before
he leaves for Rome but we all are
praying that he will get a full cure
and can document it as a Class I
miracle for Kateri's canonization.
I pray every day for that and I
also pray for you, father.

Hope you can read this as my
hands "jiggle" some. The doctors in
St. E's found my trouble was anemia
and did many tests to find out "why".
A bone marrow test showed I lacked
two things. Fortunately they were able

to prescribe pills. Am very much better
since taking the pills, but Phyllis says
it will take about a month before I
get back to normal. God has blessed me
in having her here as she is wonderful.
She would not have gone on our trip
unless I was able to go. Her car is lovely -
easy riding and warm. It was frigid
in the Kateri country - horribly cold.
We drove back to N. H. Saturday and had
a visit with my two sisters there,
one is 84 and the other 82. The temperature
there was about 20 degrees but after
Quebec it was a heat wave.

I did miss you but I sat in
the same seat you directed me to on
our previous trip.

Phyllis and I hope you will
recover from your illness and
we pray for you and Kateri.

Sincerely

Rose Y. Abbott